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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of a female elementary principal whose tenure was ended with a negotiated reassignment to a lower administrative position. The case is presented from the subject's perspective with data gathered through an open-ended interview. The initial questions were designed to gather background information relative to the subject's training, educational background, career, and socialization for an administrative position. The stage was then set for more general questions that allowed her to describe her assessment of her performance as a principal, the process used by the superintendent and the board of education to assess her performance, and the events that led to her reassignment. The 7-hour interview was audiotaped over 2 days. The purpose of this paper is therefore to analyze the external conditions, the subject's behavior, the political environment of the school district, and other relevant factors that contributed to her failure as a school principal. It concludes with implications for the preparation, training, and successful performance of other woman administrators. (TE)

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A CASE STUDY OF THE
REMOVAL OF A WOMAN PRINCIPAL

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Introduction

Recent studies have shown that the careers of women in educational administration differ from those of their male counterparts (Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Gaertner, 1981; Gross & Trask, 1976; Meskin, 1974; Ortiz, 1982; Paddock, 1981; Stockard, 1984). Despite the abundance of women within the teacher ranks, administrative positions are dominated by men. Prior to moving into an administrative role, the typical female spends more years as a teacher. The initial administrative role is likely to be a staff position with instructional services responsibilities as opposed to a position with line authority and responsibility. If and when a woman becomes a principal, it is most likely to be at the elementary level, and that will be the highest rank she will achieve (Gaertner, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987). It has also been found that if a competent individual is to be excluded from the administrative ranks, that individual is more likely to be a female (Hagen and Kahn, 1975).

Much has been written about the career barriers that women are likely to encounter in educational organizations (Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Edson, 1981; Gaertner, 1981; Paddock, 1981; Schmuck, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987). Most of these, however, refer to barriers to initial appointment to an administrative position or to advancement to a higher level position within the educational organization. Little has been written concerning barriers to success within a position. Carlson and Schmuck (1981) discuss structural contingencies relative to career barriers, contingencies over which the individual aspirant has no control. One of these barriers is identified as "...assessment, either subjective or objective, of an individual's performance in office" (Carlson and Schmuck, 1981, in Schmuck, Charters, & Carlson [Eds.] p. 124). An individual who does not perform up to standard is held back. One problem with assessment techniques is pointed out by Shakeshaft (1987). She has found that women administrators do not get corrective feedback as often as men.

This paper presents a case study of a female elementary principal whose tenure was ended with a negotiated reassignment to a lower level administrative position. The case is presented from the subject's perspective with data gathered through an open-ended interview. The initial questions were designed to gather background information relative to the subject's training, educational background, career, and socialization for an administrative position. The stage was then set for more general

questions which allowed her to describe her assessment of her performance as a principal, the process utilized by the superintendent and the board of education to assess her performance, and the events which led up to her reassignment. The interview was audio taped over a two day period and was approximately seven hours long.

The subject was identified through personal and professional contact and was assured of anonymity. A fictitious name was created for use in this paper. The subject was very eager to participate in the research in hopes that any conclusions which could be drawn might be helpful to other women in educational administration.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the external conditions, the subject's behavior, the political environment of the school district, and any other relevant factors which might have contributed to her failure as a school principal with the hope of utilizing the findings to improve school administration training programs for women.

Sheila Townsend Reynolds' Story

Sheila Townsend began teaching in Nebraska in 1948 at the age of 18 after two years of college. After one year of liberal arts studies, she had transferred to a teachers' college and completed a primary level certification in six straight quarter terms. Sheila's parents were beginning to raise concerns that her younger brother would soon be entering college adding to the financial burden. Sheila anticipated the possible need for her to drop out which prompted her decision to escalate her studies. After three years of teaching first grade in Nebraska, she moved to California where she spent five additional years teaching first grade in a small coastal school district in Ventura County just north of Los Angeles. During the five years of teaching first grade there, she commuted into Los Angeles to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree at Los Angeles State College.

With a primary goal of teaching something other than first grade Miss Townsend made her last school district change in 1956. Sheila's teaching assignment was still first grade, but there were assurances that she could move to higher grade levels soon. The circumstances were favorable in the Buena Vista Unified School District for such a change. Located in Los Angeles County, the district serviced several suburban cities and had a

stable and sizeable enrollment. After two years of teaching first grade, Miss Townsend taught fourth and fifth grade each for one year while pursuing a secondary teaching credential. She had developed a friendship at the junior high school and transferred there in 1960 where she taught eighth and ninth grade English for the next nine years. During this assignment she completed a Masters Degree in education and her administrative credential. However, she had no specific career goals in mind.

Sheila had been very active in the arts community, so in 1969 she and another single woman friend took sabbatical leaves and traveled throughout Europe for thirteen months studying architecture, sculpture, and painting. Miss Townsend describes this time as being a very significant event for her, almost a period of passage, certainly one of maturing. She found it exciting and stimulating to see other adults working in a variety of jobs outside of education. Despite the fact that she was with a very close friend, she found that being so closely linked to only one person for thirteen months in unfamiliar and ever changing surroundings was very difficult. She realized she was 40 years old and still unmarried having already devoted twenty-two years of her life to teaching and continuing her own education. Concluding that she was an emotional coward, Miss Townsend returned from her sabbatical committed to two decisions: she would take on new challenges in her career, and she would marry.

The opportunity for challenge in her career came quickly. In the spring following her return from sabbatical, Sheila was asked to finish out the school year as acting counselor when the junior high school counselor was injured in a fall resulting in an extended sick leave. Over the next summer, Miss Townsend applied for girls vice principal opening at her junior high school. She was selected and served for three years while the school district was preparing for a transition to intermediate schools. Her junior high school was the first to be converted and served as a pilot for the remaining schools.

When the new intermediate school administrative team was selected in 1974, the new principal came to the position from an elementary school principalship. Miss Townsend describes him as a person who "always put kids first, had great ideas about curriculum, and was loaded with integrity." Sheila became the assistant principal with primary responsibility for curriculum and instruction. She'd already been a girls' vice principal for three years. The other assistant principal, a former counselor, was a younger man like the principal. Sheila liked them both and enjoyed being a part of a great team working on an exciting new project for the school district, a project that suits her

dynamic, positive personality. Her principal's style was to assign her an area of responsibility in curriculum and then let her do her thing. She does not recall much collective consultation about how to approach problems and projects in the school. She describes this five year assignment as stimulating, exciting, and great fun. Most of her work was focused at the school level, although there were job alike meetings for awhile with the other intermediate school assistant principals as the reorganization of schools spread throughout the school district.

It was during this time that Sheila also met and married a high level administrator in the county education office. She took his name, having now achieved her second goal set for herself during her sabbatical, although it was more than ten years in the making. Mrs. Reynolds had also settled into an eight year assistant principal position. Her new husband pointed this out to her and was puzzled at her lack of ambition to pursue a principalship. They occasionally discussed business at home, but it was not a frequent pastime.

In the spring of 1979, rumors began to circulate that Mrs. Reynolds' principal might be transferred to another intermediate school. An elementary principalship was open. There were no female principals in the district of 27 schools which was a concern to the district leadership which was being criticized for the lack of affirmative action. Sheila can't recall who suggested she apply. It was not her principal. It was a woman, perhaps another assistant principal. Her husband also encouraged her, so she decided to apply for the principalship. Sheila and her husband, Bill, had general discussions regarding her resume and interviewing techniques. Confident of her verbal skills, she did not worry about the interview process. She knew she had all the curriculum skills. Sheila consulted no one inside the school district about the process for selection, the possible composition of the interview panels, the nature of the superintendent and his approach to interviewing finalists. It didn't occur to her that any of that would be necessary or helpful. Nor did she give much consideration to the possible competition. She did think the lack of female principals should serve in her favor. She readily admits that she didn't have any idea what the superintendent was like. Although she thought the assistant superintendent for instruction would be in her corner, in hindsight she thinks his good intentions may have proved damaging to her.

Mrs. Reynolds did well in the preliminary panel interviews finishing third in a field of over sixty applicants. She was the only candidate in the final three from inside the school district

and felt confident that she would be appointed. Therefore, she was shocked when Mr. Baldwin, the superintendent, called her in early July to inform her that she had done well and was a strong candidate, but the position had been offered to another candidate. The fact that a woman was appointed indicated to Mrs. Reynolds that she had been right about the affirmative action concerns. But she had no real idea as to why she was not selected. She did know that because the selection procedure in the school district at that time provided for an eligibility list to remain in effect for one year, that she might get a chance to be considered for the next opening.

Later that same summer, a second elementary principal opening occurred when a male elementary school principal was promoted to intermediate principal. Mrs. Reynolds had not applied for the intermediate principalship, despite the fact that she had been an intermediate/junior high school assistant principal for eight years. But because of the eligibility list, she was called back in by the superintendent for another interview for the elementary opening. It was during this interview that the superintendent first expressed his doubts about Mrs. Reynolds' ability to handle the assignment. She assured him she was up to it, convinced that her positive attitude and capacity for hard work would see her through. The superintendent said he would think it over.

A few days later the superintendent called Mrs. Reynolds in and offered her the elementary principalship, but not without again expressing his lack of confidence in her ability to do the job. He was not specific about his concerns, but he also said that none of the division heads, his administrative cabinet, had supported her appointment either. But he specified two goals that he wanted her to accomplish at the school: to clean up the physical plant and to raise student test scores. Mrs. Reynolds confidently told him she could do that. She admits, however, that she did go through a lot of thinking, such as "Oh, my God, I haven't even been to this school before. But I finally just got philosophical about it and said okay, there are a whole bunch of people, support people, who know what they're supposed to do. The teachers will go to their rooms and the kids will all come. We'll sort things out."

Unlike the first available elementary school which was located in a multi-ethnic middle class community, the second school was a large, overcrowded school located in an area that some termed a port of entry for undocumented aliens. By anyone's standards it was a difficult assignment, especially for a first year principal. Mrs. Reynolds learned that the reservations about her ability to lead this school expressed by her one anticipated supporter, Mr. Franz, the assistant superintendent for

instruction, centered around this factor. This assignment was not fair to a new, first time principal. He as a former principal knew the job was tough enough under the best of circumstances. Mrs. Reynolds speculated that the reason the superintendent went forward with her appointment despite his and his advisors' reservations was related to the fact that she was female and the only remaining inside candidate near the top of the eligibility list.

Despite the fact that she'd worked in the school district for twenty-three years, Mrs. Reynolds had never been to Shady Lane School. In mid August as she drove herself to the school for the first time she felt like she was driving forever and wondered if she would ever get there. Located in the very southern tip of the school district, Shady Lane did not live up to its name. It was indeed an ugly, barren campus with brown grass. The superintendent had been right in his assessment that the campus just looked dirty. He had said he did not know whether to attribute it to the former principal not seeing it, or if that was just the way that community was.

She parked her car and walked up the side walk of the school sighting two men who appeared to be the custodians. "Hello. I'm Sheila Reynolds, the new principal," she greeted. One man said nothing. The first words out of the other man's mouth were, "What ever happened to Carol Barnes?" Carol Barnes had been a female principal in the school district over twenty years ago who had been fired. Sheila was taken aback, but laughed and responded, "Well, I guess she's not here anymore."

After touring the campus, she agreed with the superintendent's assessment that something had to be done about the condition of the campus. She began by working with the custodial staff pointing out things that needed to be done, reorganized, changed. Mrs. Reynolds got the full cooperation of Ed, the head custodian, but there was no end of problems with the remaining crew. In addition the clerical staff presented serious problems relative to competence, loyalty, and stability. The school itself seemed strangely organized to Mrs. Reynolds. Kindergarten classes were assigned to regular classrooms in the third and fourth grade wing instead of to the specially designed kindergarten classrooms. The library was far too small to provide the type of services she envisioned necessary for a school of over 1,000 students. In light of the multitude of problems that she perceived early in the first year, she decided to focus on the campus clean up and custodial problems. Mrs. Reynolds determined that she could take care of that in the first six months and then move on to the pressing clerical problems in the second half of the year. Her decision not to initially focus on the instructional program was

based on the fact that there was an experienced assistant principal who had been assigned to the school for years. Mrs. Reynolds assumed Jim could oversee the existing program until she could give it further attention. However, she would later discover that he was not strong in curriculum, and despite his outward appearance of support of her administration, his own unsuccessful candidacy for the principalship seemed to reduce his contribution to the administrative team effort. He was pleasant, but ineffective and not very capable.

Mrs. Reynolds' efforts to clean up the campus were complicated by custodial personnel problems and what she perceived to be lack of district level support for Shady Lane School. One night custodian suspected of stealing was placed under surveillance, but the lookout person fell asleep. Eventually the suspected custodian and a substitute were found sleeping on the job. Sheila's efforts to acquire an additional eight-hour custodian were resisted by the district because custodial time was determined by formula. The formula did not reveal a need at Shady Lane. Eventually, Mrs. Reynolds did get the approval for additional time from the powerful school district business manager. Sheila felt she had finally convinced Dr. Powers that the district had been ignoring the needs of the poorer southern area of the school district and providing substandard maintenance services to Shady Lane. To her it was as if the district leadership did not consider the Shady Lane community as a part of the school district. Indeed none of the five school board members had ever been from the southern area of the school district. Mrs. Reynolds felt that every request she made for support was met with resistance. She admits she was making many requests for help, but she felt the requests were justified given the run down condition of the school and the direction given her by the superintendent to get the school cleaned up. Eventually she managed to have a pump installed to take care of a severe drainage problem outside the cafeteria, and the district agreed to remodel the library. But all of this took the entire first year.

In the meantime, the clerical staff was running amuck. Mrs. Reynolds failed to receive phone messages and important mail. The secretary was openly uncooperative. The office space was small, there were no established office procedures, and the work load for serving over 1,000 students was unmanageable given the attitude and skill level of the clerical staff. Her supporter at the district level, Mr. Franz, arranged and paid for an office management consultant to work with Mrs. Reynolds and the clerical staff to establish sound office practices. The secretary, however, didn't follow Mrs. Reynolds' directions under the new procedures. Eventually mid-way through Mrs. Reynolds' second

year, the secretary became pregnant and resigned. From then on the office situation improved when Mrs. Reynolds was able to hire her own secretary. This secretary remained loyal throughout Mrs. Reynolds' years as a principal, even transferring with Mrs. Reynolds to her second principalship assignment.

Also during the first year, Mrs. Reynolds began to detect some problems with a few veteran teachers. One in particular frequently left her students in the charge of another teacher while she went to the office to make personal phone calls. Or she would take her entire class to the first grade classroom so she could visit with that teacher. The students were well trained and well behaved in her absence, but Mrs. Reynolds knew this wasn't good for children. The veteran teacher resisted Mrs. Reynolds' corrective efforts and sought the support of other veteran teachers on campus including the union representative. They became an identifiable core of seven or eight teachers who offered resistance to many of Mrs. Reynolds' efforts over the four years she was principal at Shady Lane.

One of the other things that Mrs. Reynolds undertook during her first year at Shady Lane was to personally supervise all five student lunch periods each day in the cafeteria. Her goal was to introduce some level of civility into the lunch period. The former principal had apparently looked at school as a place for pleasure which did not include high standards of conduct. She often read stories to the children over the public address system as they ate lunch. Because this kept her away from circulating among teachers during a significant portion of the school day, she had asked Jim, the assistant principal, to supervise teacher duty coverage. She came to realize he circulated among the teachers, visiting pleasantly with them, but never actually monitoring their activities. In hind sight she thinks her lack of contact with teachers during their lunch periods may have contributed to the perception that was developing of her as a poor communicator with teachers.

As Mrs. Reynolds considered the instructional questions that would affect test scores, she realized that her predecessor had not expected students to do well on standardized tests. He had rationalized being the lowest scoring school in the district by saying you couldn't expect these children to do any better given the conditions in the community. This message was delivered to the school district leadership and apparently to teachers as well. By her second year, Sheila began to involve teachers in the placement of students for the following year. This was done through a rather elaborate analysis of the reading levels, dependent versus independent learning styles, and systems for managing their progress. The further development of a bilingual

program complicated the process, especially for the veteran monolingual teachers. Mrs. Reynolds had been hiring bilingual teachers as staff turned over rapidly in this area of the school district. Mrs. Reynolds expected the teachers to be pleased with an opportunity to get more involved. Instead it seemed to serve as an irritant. If students were properly placed and assessed for appropriate teaching modes, the alibi for their failure to achieve might become suspect. Someone was beginning to look at how children were progressing, an apparently threatening notion for the teachers.

Mrs. Reynolds has subsequently decided that her suggestions for a better means for articulation and placement of students was looked upon by teachers as a major change. Anything she did represented change and a threat to the status quo. All of this was contrary to the former principal's laissez-faire style which thrived on the notion of the staff being a big, happy family or country club. Her style was high energy, fast moving, and upbeat. This seemed to irritate teachers who were eager for stability. Some teachers were supportive of her efforts in private conversations with her, but would not speak out at staff meetings in opposition to the vocal anti-change teachers. She sometimes felt that she was too nice. The quietly supportive teachers would get irritated with Sheila, and rightfully so she thought, when she failed to "handle the bad guys." Mrs. Reynolds began to have some feelings of inadequacy as teachers mobilized against her with letters of complaints to the superintendent. She now says that she feels she was genuinely unschooled in leading and communicating as a change agent. She sincerely believes that what she wanted was instructionally good for children. The problem was bringing the teachers along with her in support of her suggested reforms.

Outside the school, Mrs. Reynolds had difficulty assessing the perception of her leadership capabilities. She frequently visited the district office to garner support for her clean-up efforts. She would pop into the superintendent's office to report to him her activities or to seek his support for added resources. On one occasion early in her first year at Shady Lane she was relating to Mr. Baldwin what she found the circumstances to be at the school. She had not intended for it to appear that she was criticizing her predecessor who had after all been promoted to an intermediate school. She merely wanted to share her perception of the obstacles she was confronting. Mr. Baldwin made it very clear that he would not entertain critical remarks about the former principal. Mrs. Reynolds' reaction was that he was right, she should not discuss other principals. Much later, however, she came to the conclusion that Mr. Baldwin's real objection was that he did not

want to hear about how much there was to do down there.

You know, I was always asking for something, I was always pushing for something, I was always making waves up there in the district office to get more resources. What he really wanted was for me to go down to that school and do the things he wanted done without making any waves, or being noticed, or bothering anyone. (Mrs. Reynolds)

As for the other principals, Mrs. Reynolds found herself so busy as a new principal that she did not seek out their company or counsel, even after there were clear indications that she was in trouble. She attended the regular principals' meetings, occasionally shared the horror stories about being a principal that were common at such gatherings, but doesn't recall ever picking up the phone to call anyone to discuss any hard times that eventually befell her. Her former principal from her intermediate school days expressed general feelings of sympathy when their conversations turned to her problems as a principal, but Mrs. Reynolds doesn't recall any specific advice or direction.

Sheila did have some early conversations with the other new woman principal who had been appointed ahead of her. In the fall of 1979 as part of the new principal socialization process, Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Green attended a state school administration/school boards conference along with most of the district's board of education members and members of the superintendent's administrative team. The two women spent a lot of time together comparing schools, problems, and perceptions of the male administrators with whom they worked. Mrs. Green shared with Mrs. Reynolds her perception of Mr. Baldwin as being a superintendent who expected the rank and file to handle their own problems. She had concluded this after consulting him regarding a personnel issue. She planned to seek counsel from other sources in the future with the intention of keeping a low profile. Mrs. Reynolds recalls this observation and realizes Mrs. Green, an outsider, was the only one to share with her that perception of the superintendent. But at the time she paid little attention to the notion that the superintendent might expect her to solve her school's problems independent of his counsel.

However, this quality in Mrs. Reynolds appeared to be of grave concern to Mr. Baldwin. Two years later as problems mounted, he called Sheila in for a conference. A few days later in a memo to her summarizing their conversation, he pointed out to Sheila that she had asked for and received more resources from the district office than any other principal in the school district. He

questioned her ability to prioritize problems, indicating that she seemed to see any problem as major resulting in Sheila's continued "frenzied efforts to attack many problems to the detriment of adequate attention to the more important issues." In addition he pointed out that her frequent references during principals' and other meetings to insurmountable problems at her school contributed to his perception that the job of school principal might be beyond her capabilities. He suggested that she might be more effective in another assignment in the school district. However, in the "spirit of continued assistance," he requested her to do five things:

1. Reflect on her experiences as a principal and consider a request for reassignment if she felt she could not be an effective principal.
2. Listen carefully to the what is being told to her.
3. List three to five of her top priorities as principal for the remainder of the school year. Obtain his approval of these top priorities and work only on these important objectives.
4. Attend scheduled meetings and come to the meetings on time.
5. Air problems involving herself in private with him or with the appropriate division head.

Sheila responded with a list of four priorities related to improving test scores; smoothly implementing year-round school the following July; continuing to improve the rapport between teachers and administration; and supporting and improving five enrichment areas of the curriculum. Mr. Baldwin thought these looked "great", and he approved them expressing renewed hope that the situation could improve. He told her to advise him if the district office could be of help with regard to the four areas.

Facing this ordeal one might have expected Mrs. Reynolds to look to someone else whose professional opinion she valued, a mentor perhaps. Although she looked to Mr. Franz, the instructional division head, for support for her efforts related to her school, she did not consider him to be her mentor. Nor did she identify anyone else either inside or outside of the school district as her mentor. This seems especially noteworthy, considering her more than thirty-year affiliation with Buena Vista Unified School District. As for Mr. Franz, she said he was always a good listener and assisted her in getting funding for inservices she needed, but he did not offer advice.

Sheila never sought much advice from Bill, her husband. She does not attribute this to the fact that their marriage ended during her third year as a principal because she and Bill have remained

close friends despite the divorce. Nor does she necessarily attribute the pressures of her job to the failure of her marriage, although she does admit much of her energy was directed toward work. She did indicate that Bill's advice to her on one occasion had been to document her difficulties with the superintendent and to utilize memo responses to his concerns. This technique had apparently been successful for him in the past. Sheila had ruled this out immediately as not a comfortable style for her. Besides, the process would have been far too time consuming, especially considering the secretarial problems she was experiencing at her school.

Sheila Reynolds was facing the mounting problems alone without seeking the advice and counsel of a mentor, fellow administrators or principals, or friends. Faculty continued to be negative writing letters of complaints to the superintendent, demanding personal meetings with him to discuss Mrs. Reynolds' administrative competencies. The vocal faculty were especially critical of Sheila's communication skills. She says that she thinks she moved and talked too quickly for them. She was not successful in bringing them along towards her goals of improved instructional programs for the school. She chose to ignore the negative individuals assuming that if she continued with her positive attitude and relentlessly pursued her goals for improved academics, those few negative souls would either finally see the light and join her cause, or they would choose to transfer to other schools. She had in fact facilitated the transfer of one such individual which had encouraged her to believe that if she would have been allowed to continue as principal at Shady Lane long enough, others of her opponents on the faculty would have followed suit.

Another encouraging sign was when Jim, the disgruntled assistant principal, transferred to another school at the end of her third year as principal. He had become completely ineffective failing to follow her directions, in addition to his seeming lack of administrative skills. In his place she acquired as her new assistant principal Beth Spicer, who had been serving as an intermediate assistant principal. Miss Spicer's skills were in the area of curriculum and instruction. Also added to the school's administrative team shortly thereafter was Linda Ellis who directed the state and federal programs at the school. She was particularly strong at community and support staff relations. Mrs. Reynolds was very optimistic about her chances of turning everything around with this new team effort. Finally she had been able to select her own supportive administrative team which she felt was balanced by the conservative instructional expertise of Beth Spicer and the dynamic creativity of Linda Ellis. But this experiential high was short lived.

At the beginning of Mrs. Reynolds' fourth year as principal, Buena Vista had converted Shady Lane and five other schools to year-round schedules. The bilingual program was expanded under Linda Ellis' direction. Other instructional changes were underway as well, all of which contributed to the general dissatisfaction of the vocal faculty who opposed Mrs. Reynolds' administration. They continued their complaints to the superintendent requesting that he come to the school to meet with them. Sheila pleaded with him not to do that as she saw that as a sign of lack of support for her. On one occasion the assistant superintendent for community services had attended a faculty meeting concerning some business from his division. Faculty raised some other controversial and hostile issue which Mrs. Reynolds decided to address never getting to the assistant superintendent's issue. He told her she had handled the meeting poorly and reported that to the superintendent as well.

Mrs. Reynolds looks back at the whole situation trying to determine what might have worked, especially with the faculty. She perceived herself as a threat to the teachers because she knew so much about curriculum, so she consciously decided to avoid frequent visits to the classrooms. Upon reflection she wonders if it might not have been better to have been in there frequently, every day, allowing teachers to get to know her and to know precisely how she could help them. She speculates that this kind of behavior on her part might have turned things around.

Sheila points out that communication was always the big thing.

It didn't make any difference how many bulletins I put out, or how many representative groups I would pull in. And see, I had a system, a representative system, but at that school, that wasn't the way we do it." Everything had been done informally while the former principal and his assistant walked around campus casually talking with faculty. (Mrs. Reynolds)

Toward the end of Sheila Reynolds' fourth year, the superintendent called her in to discuss her performance. He suggested she might want to leave the district, to seek a job in some other district since things weren't working out for her. She rejected that outright. She knew that he was aware that she would be retiring soon. She speculated that Mr. Baldwin thought she might voluntarily retire if he increased the pressure. Some weeks later he announced the transfers of a number of principals for the next school year, 1983-84, including Sheila who was transferred to an small upper-middle class school in the northern

end of the school district. Mr. Baldwin again asked her to leave the district or to retire. He did not discuss any other assignment at a level lower than principal for her within the school district at that time. When she elected to accept the transfer remaining with the school district he advised her to stay out of trouble at the new school.

The beginning of the first year at the new school went very well. She maintained a very low profile as far as her encounters with the superintendent. "It was as if I had walked on water." Even Charlie Chu, the executive secretary of the teachers' union, came up to Mrs. Reynolds at a district social event and in front of the superintendent made a point to tell her to keep up whatever it was she was doing. This made her uncomfortable. Despite the fact that he had always been very cordial, she was leery of him. Once he had taken her out to lunch, something which Sheila said "scared me to death. I had no idea what it was all about." She'd really never had any meetings with him, despite the teacher unrest at her first school. Mr. Chu had visited the school frequently to meet with teachers, but he would merely stop by her office to let her know he was on campus with no further comments.

During the second half of the first year at La Mirada School, two events occurred to which Mrs. Reynolds can trace the beginning of the end of her principalship. The first involved a plan introduced by the assistant superintendent for community services when he called in February or March to tell her that because the district's class average at the second grade was over the state maximum, it was going to be necessary to add a teacher to her school since there was an empty classroom available. He told Sheila she could assign no more than 20 children to the class in order to keep the class size average within the legal limit, despite the fact that the normal class size in the district was over thirty. Shortly after that the district consultant for the gifted and talented program came to see Mrs. Reynolds with a proposal for the new class. Because there were some gifted students at some neighboring schools who were not being serviced, the consultant wanted Sheila's blessing to get the new position at La Mirada identified as a gifted class. The consultant had interviewed a teacher whom Sheila already knew to be a superb teacher of the gifted. Sheila had some concerns about the gifted students at her school anyway as they were being pulled out once a week to go to a computer literacy class at the adjacent intermediate school. From what Sheila could see that was the extent of the gifted program, so this idea seemed terrific to her.

The plans went forward. This superb new teacher came on board as the teacher of the gifted and talented. A few gifted students

from other schools transferred to La Mirada, and the gifted of La Mirada were reassigned to the new teacher. Previously they had been clustered throughout the third and fourth grade classes. There was immediate opposition to the plan by La Mirada's third and fourth grade teachers, despite the fact that the new teacher worked endless hours not only in her own classroom but for and with other teachers as well. Sheila now realizes her agreement to the plan had put all of La Mirada's teachers on guard thinking that she didn't believe they were any good with the gifted. From that time forward, she could never count on the third and fourth grade teachers to support any of her actions.

I mean, it was the worst thing I that I ever did. Not for kids! But the worst thing I have ever done! (Mrs. Reynolds)

The second troublesome event was the reduction in School Improvement funds allocated to La Mirada. Sheila received word from Mr. Franz in the spring, 1984, that the funding would be eliminated. But she struggled and argued and persuaded him to reconsider. He made some concessions merely reducing her programming, but by an amount with which Mrs. Reynolds felt she could live. However, Mr. Franz retired over the summer of 1984. When Sheila returned from vacation in late August she was informed by the director of state and federal projects that many changes would be necessary. It took over a month to straighten out the budget problems. Key to this problem was the funding of the half-time resource teacher position at La Mirada which had been held for years by Judy Davis. The other half of Mrs. Davis' assignment was at the district office assisting schools in organizing parent volunteers. She became very anxious about the possible loss of funding for her position at La Mirada. And despite the fact that Sheila's negotiations with the district project office resulted in keeping the position in the budget plus a few other items, she was never forgiven by the staff or Mrs. Davis for her perceived mishandling of the budget.

Once the School Improvement budget was in place later that fall, Sheila tried to turn the monitoring of it over to Judy who was resource teacher for the project. But she was either unable or unwilling to assume that responsibility. Mrs. Reynolds thinks that despite the confident air that Mrs. Davis projects, that she really lacked confidence with regard to the budget. On occasions she would tell Sheila that it was just too much. But Sheila had a real need to delegate this activity to the resource teacher as most other principals in the district elected to do as well. Mrs. Reynolds attempted to teach Judy about the various accounts and procedures, but without success.

It became apparent soon that Mrs. Davis had turned against Sheila. This was a difficult turn of events for Mrs. Reynolds because she and Judy had worked well together the first year. In fact, Judy had written Sheila a personal note in January of 1984, telling her what a great team she thought they made. Mrs. Reynolds first became aware of the loss of Judy's loyalty when a kindergarten teacher who was politically active in the community and supportive of Mrs. Reynolds came to her saying that Judy Davis was out to get her. Sheila's reaction was one of disbelief. She could understand not getting along with someone, but Sheila could not imagine that it would be important enough to Judy to have the principal gone! Mrs. Reynolds' nature is to ignore such information. She didn't want to give it too much credence as that could affect her judgment.

However, Sheila came to see that she was facing opposition on nearly every issue that came before the staff. She had determined that the staff was about evenly divided on most issues. Because she did have supporters among staff and parents alike, she felt she could ride out the opposition. Mrs. Reynolds was aware that teachers were holding meetings to discuss their discontent with her administration. She did not believe that there was much parent support for the opposition.

In the spring, 1985, Mr. Baldwin called her in for a conference concerning complaints he had received from teachers which focused on Mrs. Reynolds' communication and management skills. His comment to her was that he didn't think she was going to make it. Her thought was, "Well, I've heard that a hundred times before!" Sheila told him she had been working with the staff on communication and was willing to continue those efforts. A communication workshop had been recommended to her. She would attend it over the summer and implement techniques in the fall to address the concerns of the staff. Sheila indicated to Mr. Baldwin that she felt they were over the worst of the budget concerns and that the gifted program was off to a good start if only the staff would give it a chance. She pledged to make new efforts in the fall indicating she would try everything she knew to improve the communication with staff. The conversation ended with Mr. Baldwin saying they'd give it till December because Sheila had indicated she was convinced changes would be apparent by then.

Over that summer, Mrs. Reynolds attended the communications workshop. In the fall she implemented some procedures relative to meetings and general communication which she had learned. One such technique was for minutes of staff meetings to be taken so that decisions would be clear to all. Another was that if individuals had concerns about an issue that they should speak

for themselves and direct their comments to Sheila. In this way she could be certain to be aware of the concerns, the number of people who actually shared the concerns, and could better respond to them. A communications consultant from the workshop came to the school to conduct a session with the staff. Mrs. Reynolds also continued her monthly luncheons with the teachers in her office. These sessions had always been informal with no school business agenda, merely opportunities to socialize and get to know one another better. From her point of view, things were going well. Everyone was smiling and pleasant. Teachers were volunteering to take minutes at staff meetings. Sheila felt the new techniques were going well, although she was aware that teachers were not voicing any concerns to her.

For at least half the staff, things were not going well. According to Sheila's assessment after the fact, she realized the teachers who had volunteered to keep minutes of the meetings had actually utilized that information as part of a documentation process for preparing a memo to the superintendent to let him know that in their opinion nothing had improved since June. In fact, they alleged that the situation continued to deteriorate under Mrs. Reynolds' administration. The memo, sent to Mr. Baldwin November 7, 1985, was very detailed in outlining examples of mismanagement of a fieldtrip, back to school night, the Halloween parade, and decisions regarding a grant for a computer lab. They further accused her of making comments at parent meetings which resulted in the alienation of parents from teachers. It was signed by eleven teachers. It included a staff list so that the superintendent could see that ten faculty members had not signed it. There were such comments as "hired by administration" beside the names on that list. The memo made reference to their communication with Mr. Baldwin in the spring indicating that he had wanted them to update him by December concerning the conditions at La Mirada.

A second complaint memo from parents went to the superintendent the next day. Although milder in tone and less specific in complaints, that letter did state that they "cannot allow her (Mrs. Reynolds) to remain." The parent letter had a carbon copy to Mrs. Reynolds.

Mr. Baldwin called Mrs. Reynolds to tell her he needed to speak with her about these letters. An appointment was made for Friday, November 22, 1985, which was later rescheduled by him for Tuesday, November 26, just before the Thanksgiving vacation. He told Mrs. Reynolds that he wanted her to resign her principalship position, and that if she decided not to do this, he would recommend to the board of education that she not be rehired for the following year. Mr. Baldwin reminded her that in June he had

agreed to give her until December to resolve the problems at La Mirada. The arrival of the letters from staff and parents and meetings which he had held with them indicated to him that the problems were not likely to be resolved if she were to remain as principal of the school. He recommended that she seek the advice of the Association for California School Administrators regarding her rights.

By the time Mrs. Reynolds returned from Thanksgiving vacation and had consulted the ACSA representative, it was early December. Although she did manage to get information regarding her rights from the representative, Mrs. Reynolds decided early on that ACSA would not be truly representing her. She learned that the representative contacted the superintendent regarding her situation before returning her telephone call to ACSA requesting help. When the representative did contact her, he advised her that she could be removed from her position immediately. It had not even occurred to her that she would not be able to remain in the principalship until June. She did not know that the school district could remove her from the position as long as she was paid her principalship salary for the remainder of the school year. She could be reassigned to any other position, including classroom teacher, as long as her salary was maintained until the end of the contract year. In the mean time the board of education could take action concerning her assignment for the following year. This would have to be done by March, 1986, and her new position would then most likely result in a reduction in salary for the following school year.

All of this was naturally of grave importance for Mrs. Reynolds, not only from a professional point of view in terms of the appropriateness and acceptability of her future assignment, but also from a personal security perspective. With retirement in her near future, she did not want her assignment and salary to jeopardize her retirement benefits to the point of causing her undue financial hardship. Despite the fact that teachers at La Mirada who supported her had sent a supportive memo to the superintendent in December, Sheila began to realize that her best alternative was to consider other assignments within the school district which would be acceptable to her professionally and personally. A classroom teaching assignment was absolutely unacceptable, and she made this clear throughout her discussions with Mr. Baldwin. She reminded him that when it had been necessary to remove male administrators in the past, that they had not been reassigned to the classroom. She gave him a specific example of one for whom a special position was created. She knew it was imperative for her to quickly identify an acceptable position for herself and begin negotiating with the superintendent.

The person who actually came up with the suggestion was Mrs. Reynolds' friend and supporter, the kindergarten teacher at La Mirada. The school district had been selected to participate in a Getty Art Project. Despite the fact that the district had an art consultant, the size and nature of the Getty Project far exceeded the time and talents of that consultant. Sheila's long involvement in the art education community and her good working relationship with the district art consultant seemed to make her a natural choice to serve as consultant for the new Getty Project. Both the district art consultant and the kindergarten teacher had good ties to at least two of the members of the board of education.

December, 1985, was a difficult month for Mrs. Reynolds. She attended a meeting with the superintendent and the parents who had called for her removal. She could see that her future was not associated with La Mirada, despite the fact that a group of two hundred supportive parents had signed a petition to retain her as principal. Sheila was greatly disappointed with the services of the professional organization. And she was determined to hold steady so that she could prevail with the superintendent and the board of education regarding the consultant position. She determined that her best strategy was to hold out her intentions for awhile because she knew that the superintendent would want to avoid a messy situation. If one were imminent and her proposed solution could avoid that, time delays could serve to her advantage. This also gave her supporters time to approach the superintendent and the individual members of the board of education to lobby for Sheila's assignment as Getty Consultant.

Mrs. Reynolds returned from Christmas vacation without having written a letter requesting a transfer from the principalship. On Friday, January 10, 1986, she took a vacation day to have some emergency repairs done to her house. She received a phone call at home from Mr. Marshall, the assistant superintendent for personnel, who advised her that he had drafted a letter for her regarding her reassignment request. He read it to her over the phone and suggested that if it was what she wanted, would she please come in and sign it in his office that day. There were parts that Sheila did not like at all. She wanted the ACSA representative to read it because there was a reference to her eventual resignation in 1987. This letter of resignation was to be held by the ACSA representative until the 1986-87 school year at which time he would turn the letter over to the board of education because of a stipulation that no resignation can be submitted until the year of its effective date.

Mrs. Reynolds went to the personnel office. She rewrote various paragraphs, specifically the one regarding her resignation. She decided to word it to the effect that she intended to resign in June, 1987, rather than actually agreeing to resignation. She also requested the opportunity to continue until 1988 if the consultant position were extended until then. No matter when she actually resigned, she did state that she intended to participate in the school district's early retirement program. The key element of the letter, however, was her request to be transferred from the principalship to the consultant position effective January 31, 1986, which was the last day of the first semester. She signed the final draft that day, January 10, 1986, in the personnel office.

At a regular meeting of the board of education, Mrs. Reynolds met in executive session to discuss her request for reassignment. Although Mr. Baldwin was present, he did not participate in the discussion. Sheila now thinks he was very uncomfortable, afraid that she would discuss the merits of her removal as principal. But she confined her comments to her request for reassignment. She explained why she thought she could be of service to the district in this capacity. One board member asked her if she would agree to return to the classroom. She said no. Another asked if she would take a reduction in salary. She said no. She was asked if she would consider other consultant positions to which she said yes. The only female board member is an active supporter of the arts and asked questions that allowed Sheila to demonstrate her expertise in this area. Sheila was also aware that she had been urged by the art consultant to support Mrs. Reynolds' request for reassignment. There was no discussion of the events leading to this meeting, and none of the board members' questions related to her performance as principal. Sheila had no idea how much the board members actually knew about the events. The meeting was conducted in a very courteous, civil manner.

The board of education agreed to Sheila Reynolds' proposal. She began her new duties at the opening of the second semester in February, 1986. The coordinator of personnel, a former intermediate school assistant principal was appointed acting principal at La Mirada. Sheila has enjoyed her work with the Getty Project tremendously. She gets a great deal of satisfaction from the job and is convinced it has added five years to her life. After further consultation with retirement counselors, she discovered she did need to continue working one year longer to maximize her retirement benefits. In order to do this, Mrs. Reynolds submitted a request to the board of education to consider a delay of her original intent to resign from June, 1987, to June, 1988. She met with the board to explain her need

for the extension. It was granted, but when the superintendent met with her to advise her of the decision, he made it clear that all parties were indignant because she had reneged on her original proposal. Mrs. Reynolds was not bothered by his attitude. Her only concern was that she got what was best for herself.

Mrs. Reynolds' Analysis

Mrs. Reynolds has reflected on her experiences as a principal and why they were unsuccessful. Throughout the experience she felt she was always in control and handling things well. She has determined that this may not have always been the case. She attended an administrators' inservice regarding leadership styles during her fifth year as a principal. It was there that she first learned of situational and contingency leadership. Her assessment of some of her problems in staff relations is that she adhered relentlessly to a participative leadership style whether or not the staff was willing or ready to participate. She did not take into consideration their motivations, maturity, or needs. Because what she was doing was good for children, she assumed her staff would eventually accept her leadership. Sheila attributes her actions to inexperience and being unschooled in leadership, especially relative to being an effective change agent.

Mrs. Reynolds certainly isn't willing to accept all of the responsibility for her demise. She never thought the superintendent gave her specific advice or strategies for improvement, despite his lengthy memo in January, 1982. She saw this more as what he wanted her to do, but not how to do it. She feels she could have benefited from some real "how to" advice. Sheila had other problems with how the superintendent perceived her and the role of principals in the school district. She believes that he measures the goodness of principals by how few waves they make, how little they ask for in terms of resources, and how independently they manage to run their schools. Mrs. Reynolds believes that he really does not want to know what problems are confronting principals. Her early attempts to keep him up to date on the problems at her school obviously served to her disadvantage in terms of his perception of her ability to handle the situation.

As Mrs. Reynolds analyzes her relationship with fellow principals, she cannot recall any of them giving her any specific advice when she shared some of the troublesome situations that

existed with her staff. She didn't really ask for advice either. She does recall that sympathy was frequently extended to her by other principals, but not advice.

Sheila describes herself as an idea person and that this contributed to her problems with the superintendent. She felt he was threatened by idea people like herself. She knew that other idea people, even idea men, had experienced difficulties with Mr. Baldwin. But those idea men had survived. She attributed this survival to their maleness and that common link of being able to discuss or play sports with the superintendent which then carried them through the difficult times. Many times in conversations others would say to her that they knew her entire situation would have been handled differently if she had not been a woman. In fact women had not been successful in the district in the past, as indicated by the story about the custodian's memory of Carol Barnes' dismissal. But Mrs. Reynolds hopes that trend has been turned around during the six and a half years that she was a principal because eight women were added to the principal ranks over that period.

Conclusions

After interviewing Mrs. Reynolds regarding her perceptions and conclusions about her performance, she provided copies of the memos concerning her performance which were written by the superintendent, members of her staff, and parents from her second school. Admittedly no one other than Sheila Reynolds was interviewed, but some important conclusions can be drawn based on information from both sides of this issue because of the availability of these documents. The analysis of these conclusions has clear implications for the preparation, training, and successful performance of other woman administrators.

1. Sheila Reynolds' career fit the pattern of many women in educational administration. She spent thirty years as a classroom teacher and as an assistant principal before being named a principal. She had not interfaced with other administrators much over that lengthy instructional career.
2. Despite these many years of experience, she attributed some of her failings, especially those relative to leadership style and effectiveness, to her lack of experience. She clarified this by saying she lacked experience as the main, sole administrator.
3. Mrs. Reynolds had no sponsor or mentor. This fact contributed to several of her problems:

- a. delayed entry into a principalship,
- b. a lack of information about the selection process for principals,
- c. lack of information about the structure and operation of the school district,
- d. lack of information about the superintendent's expectations of principals,
- e. the unavailability of seasoned advice and reflection when she encountered problems as a principal,
- f. the sense of isolation which accompanies the position of principal was exaggerated,
- g. no assistance was available to make the transition into the principal ranks.

4. Her administrative credential training program lacked substance with regard to leadership style, decision making, organizational theory, politics of education, interpersonal and group relations, and theories of change.

5. Mrs. Reynolds' participation in community and educational organizations focused on special interests such as the arts and instructional matters. She did not participate actively in organizations related to school administration, particularly those related to women in administration which might have been helpful to her in terms of raising her consciousness to the politics of success as a school administrator and in updating her general administration skills.

6. Mrs. Reynolds did not think that the superintendent gave her specific feedback concerning her performance and need for improvement. In analyzing one memo to her from him, it could be described as very specific in content as to what he wanted her to do. However, she was looking for specificity in process, technique, or strategy. Therefore she perceived the feedback to be only general in nature and not very helpful.

7. Mrs. Reynolds' reaction to the superintendent as her evaluator served as a barrier to any corrective behavior on her part. She thought it ironic and somewhat unfair that she was being judged to have poor people skills by a man who she felt also lacked such skills. This sense of unfairness seemed to immobilize her from seeking help or advice as to how to deal with him and the situation.

8. Lacking a supportive mentor or network of fellow administrators, Mrs. Reynolds had no source for consultation to assist her in translating the superintendent's specific content suggestions into specific corrective actions.

9. Mrs. Reynolds relied on what she described as one constant administrative style throughout her tenure as principal of two different schools. Despite the fact that her approach was extremely positive, it did not take into account the situational factors or the readiness of the staff for what Mrs. Reynolds describes as a participative approach.

10. Mrs. Reynolds underestimated the power of the teaching staff. In a district where the teachers' union is very strong, the teachers knew that they had the ear of the superintendent.

11. Mrs. Reynolds did not realize the politics of the situation. She believed that because she was working toward goals that were good for children, that over time she would prevail. The fact that teachers continued to complain about her leadership was a problem to the superintendent. His eventual method of resolving the problem was to eliminate her.

Borrowing terms from Catherine Marshall's (1979) dissertation on the career socialization of women, one could conclude that Sheila Townsend Reynolds failed to make the transition from a culturally defined woman to a self-defined role as a female school administrator. She clung to the notion that she would prevail if she continued to do things which were good for the children. She entered the principalship at a time when there were concerns in the school district about the lack of female principals. Unfortunately for Mrs. Reynolds, she had not completed the socialization process that Marshall describes as so important to role confidence and satisfaction resulting from successful transition into a male dominated profession. Mrs. Reynolds lacked the supportive network and advice associated with a mentor relationship. She was not successful in identifying and capitalizing on substitutions for her lack of socialization.

For those of us involved in preparation programs for school administrators, there are special lessons to be learned relative to female candidates. It is incumbent upon us to teach women about the political realities of organizations. Greater attention must be focused on theories of management, decision-making, intergroup relations, and change. Access to the socialization process is possible for women, but they first must realize its substance and importance. Most importantly, university professors must serve as real and surrogate sponsors for women as they strive to succeed as educational administrators.

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